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ADDRESS
OF
CHARLES HENRY JONES
AT
WHITEMARSH

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An Address

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY

OF

SONS OF THE REVOLUTION

AT

WHITEMARSH

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

June 19, 1909

BY

CHARLES HENRY JONES

Chairman of the Board of Managers

PHILADELPHIA, 1909

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EMLEN HOUSE, WHITEMARSH, PA., WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS, 1777.

FRONT OR SOUTH VIEW, 1909.

My Fellow-members of the Sons of the Revolution:—

We are assembled to-day on historic ground. All the region about us was trodden by soldiers of the Continental Army with feet so badly protected that Washington was obliged unsuccessfully to offer a reward for the best substitute for shoes made out of raw hides.

One hundred and thirty-two years ago the Continental Army pitched its tents and made its huts on the hillside yonder, and on Militia Hill, which lies behind us, where it remained for thirty-nine days—a longer period than at any other place in Pennsylvania, except Valley Forge.

Chestnut Hill lay three miles away in its front, and beyond was the British Army under Sir William Howe (the only British Army in America since the surrender of Burgoyne) closely withdrawn, since the battle of Germantown, within its strong entrenchments, which extended from Kensington on the Delaware to the Schuylkill at Callowhill Street, and consisted of a succession of strong redoubts connected by abatis.

It was the same Continental Army, practically under the same officers, that I described to you in detail upon a former occasion when we visited its camping ground upon the banks of the Neshaminy, increased by reinforcements and depleted by the dead and wounded it had lost at Brandywine, Paoli and Germantown, and by the sick who had dropped out because of exposure and neglect. Three months had elapsed since the army left its quiet camp at Neshaminy, and within

that time it had marched as far south as Wilmington, had suffered defeat at Brandywine, had marched as far to the west as the Warren Tavern, as far to the north as Potts Grove, and then, by easy stages down to Whitemarsh, where we now are. On its way here it had lost the Battle of Germantown. The right wing reached this place by the way of the Skippack Road, which lies before us, and the left wing marched down the Morris Road a few miles yonder to the north. The territory within the points I have named is known as the seat of the Revolutionary War in Pennsylvania. Through this seat of war the main army marched and countermarched, and sent out detachments hither and thither for various purposes until the inhabitants along nearly all the roads that traversed it became familiar with the sight of its officers and men. The soldiers of the army stopped at their doors on their weary marches and the officers made their quarters in their homes. There were no bright spots in this campaign to lift up the spirits of these poorly clad and poorly fed Continentals. When they looked back over it from here they found nothing in the retrospect but discouragement and defeat. The spirit that sustained them came not from their environment. They were uplifted by the spirit that was within. In addition to all their misfortunes which were beyond control, they had just cause for the dissatisfaction that prevailed throughout the Camp arising from the unsatisfactory way in which their rank was adjusted and the unsatisfactory treatment they received from an inefficient government.

The transfer of the seat of war to Pennsylvania endowed with a deep and lasting interest the places which lie about

us, and we, as a Society composed of the descendants of the soldiers of the Revolution, do well to commemorate the events associated with these places and keep them ever fresh in the minds of the people.

The campaign of 1777 began at Neshaminy late in August and ended here before the middle of December. It was one of the most important campaigns of the War and included within its scope the hard fighting at Brandywine, Paoli, Germantown, Fort Mifflin and Fort Mercer; the skirmishes that took place here, at the foot of Chestnut Hill and other places as well as long marches under the depressing weight of defeat. We remember this army in its open camp at Neshaminy with their troubles before them, waiting to learn the destination of Howe's fleet, not knowing whether to move toward the Hudson or to the southward, harassed by nothing but their perplexities in those pleasant August days. We find them here after their terrible experiences, amid the rigors and discomforts of winter, dejected, but not dismayed, defiantly intrenched in a strong position, with a powerful, well-disciplined, well-equipped and superior European army in their front.

The story of the historical events that transpired here may be briefly told.

The army arrived here November 2d, 1777. It at once built a redoubt on its extreme right, on the high ground above the Bethlehem Road, which commanded that road. This redoubt is still there as the Continental soldiers built it, and is of supreme interest to us, though not a shot was fired at it, and it was not found to be necessary to fire a shot over its

breastworks. What fighting there was in this neighborhood took place further to the eastward.

The camp of the army was laid out, three miles in length, along the southern slope of the range of hills that runs from that redoubt to the eastward; the left wing lying nearly opposite Edge Hill. They threw up entrenchments in their front, and cut down trees, which, with their branches extending outward, formed a sort of improvised abatis. Their position was further protected by a creek known as Sandy Run, which ran along the foot of these hills from one end of the camp to the other and beyond. Washington made his headquarters at the house of George Emlen, near the centre of the army, at the foot of the hills on the inside of Sandy Run. Here he was visited by many distinguished men, both in the civil and military life of the times, and by a Committee of Congress.

The army fit for duty consisted, when it arrived at Whitemarsh, of 8313 Continental troops and 2717 militia. They were ragged and half naked, without shoes or blankets, in consequence of which there was much sickness. All the sick were sent to improvised hospitals in their rear. They were without money—not having received their October or November pay. They seldom had more than a day or two's provisions ahead and often not that—either of meat or bread.

Washington watched from this camp, with keen interest, the magnificent struggle going on below Philadelphia to maintain the defenses of the Delaware, going upon one occasion to the top of the Chew House in Germantown to overlook the situation, but owing to the doggedness of Gates in neg-

lecting to send him reinforcements from the Northern Army he was not able to do for the relief of those fortifications all that he anxiously desired. It was while here that Washington heard the discouraging news of the fall of Fort Mifflin and Fort Mercer. While here Washington was constantly annoyed by the machinations of the Conway Cabal. It was from here that he administered his dignified and withering rebuke to Conway. The army had passed through this campaign with such rapidity that Washington had been without his baggage since the middle of September. The settlements about the army were filled with tories. It was here that General Stephen was court martialled and dismissed the service. Lafayette, who had held a commission as Major General for three months without a command commensurate with his rank, was becoming very much dissatisfied, and Washington was able to show his esteem for him by giving him command of Stephen's Division.

A council of war was held here on November 24th to consider the question of an attack upon the British in Philadelphia, and Washington went to the west side of the Schuylkill to reconnoiter the enemy's works. Eleven of the more conservative members of the council wisely voted against the advisability of such an attack and only four voted in favor of it. These impulsive four were Wayne, Scott, Sterling and Woodford. Wagons were converted into magazines to protect the ammunition from the weather. Many of the men made rude huts for their shelter out of such material as they could find, as there were not tents enough to go round. With the exception of a few days late in November the

weather was stormy and very cold. During the early days of the camp the ground was covered with snow.

Tardily toward the end of November, Washington's Army received large reinforcements from the Northern Army amounting to about 5500 men, including Poor's, Warner's, Patterson's, Learned's and Glover's brigades, Morgan's corps of riflemen and Lee's, Jackson's, Webb's and Bailey's regiments.

All detachments which had been sent out from this army were called in about the first of December, as information had reached headquarters that it was the intention of General Howe to make an attack upon the American camp.

Even the men who later had been sent away with the baggage who had clothing and shoes sufficient to enable them to do duty were called back.

Howe had received large reinforcements from the army in New York, and as early as November 27th he wrote to the Ministry that a forward movement against the enemy would immediately take place.

Having left a small garrison behind under General Leslie, the whole British Army under General Howe left Philadelphia at one o'clock (after midnight) on the morning of Friday, December 5th. The right wing under Cornwallis marched out the Germantown Road, and the left wing under Knyphausen marched by the Ridge Road along the Schuylkill. A few dragoons were in the advance of the right wing, followed by two battalions of light infantry commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Abercrombie and Major Maitland. These dragoons and light infantry were attacked by a party of Continental

troops under the gallant and vigilant Captain Allen McLane before they reached Germantown, and he it was who reported to Washington the approach of the enemy.

The British Army reached Chestnut Hill before daylight on the 5th of December. From there (stretched out before them) they could see the camp fires of the Continental Army, along the hills of Whitemarsh, and, guided by them, they formed their lines, built their own camp fires, and rested on their arms until daybreak, which at that season of the year did not occur until nearly seven o'clock. The pickets of the two armies exchanged shots continually during the night.

The British Army came out without its tents or baggage, expecting, no doubt, with unwarranted assurance, to make a short campaign of it, and easily, as they boasted, dispose of their enemies. Nor did they carry with them more than two days' provisions, for at two o'clock on the morning of the 7th it was found necessary to send out to them a supply from Philadelphia escorted by the 40th, the 55th and the 71st regiments. This strong escort was deemed necessary because the wagon train was long, and because they had a proper appreciation of the danger to which it was exposed within the lines of the Continental Army.

The alarm guns were fired from the Continental camp when the British camp fires appeared along the top of Chestnut Hill, and the Continental troops repaired to their alarm posts. The baggage of the Continental Army was sent to the Trappe, and the Pennsylvania Militia, 600 strong, under General James Irvine, which was posted on Militia Hill, behind us, was sent out to skirmish with the enemy's advance parties.

The second battalion of British light infantry was in the advance when the head of the army reached the foot of Chestnut Hill. As the Pennsylvania Militia approached, a British company of riflemen under Lieutenant Armstrong advanced rapidly to the front and were immediately attacked by the Pennsylvania Militia. The militia succeeded in almost surrounding them, when, from his perilous position, Lieutenant Armstrong sounded an alarm that brought to his assistance the British light infantry. After this but two or three volleys were fired when the militia retreated precipitately with a loss of forty killed, wounded and prisoners. Among the wounded was General Irvine, their commander, who lost three fingers, received a severe contusion in the head and was taken a prisoner to Philadelphia. The enemy lost about twelve killed and wounded, among the latter being Sir James Murray. This discrepancy in the fatalities arose, no doubt, from the fact that the Pennsylvania Militia were not so direct in their fire as the trained British soldiery.

The British Army proceeded cautiously, after this skirmish, up the Bethlehem Road on the morning of the 5th, and before they reached Flourtown turned to the right and took a strong position in the woods in front of the American camp, about a mile and a half distant from it, along a range of hills which ran parallel with and were higher than those upon which the Continental Army was encamped. Along these hills they lay inactively during the remainder of the 5th and the whole of Saturday the 6th of December.

General Howe having satisfied himself during that time that the American right was too strong to be successfully

Stone Erected by the Sons of the Revolution to Mark the Site of the Redoubt at Whitemarsh.

attacked, moved his army at one o'clock on the morning of Sunday the 7th, still further to the eastward along the same range of hills, until his right rested on the Limekiln Road below Edge Hill, about half a mile east of the point where the Church Road crosses Willow Grove Avenue. His left lay opposite the American centre. For the protection of this movement the first and second battalions of British light infantry divested themselves of their blankets and accoutrements and scoured the woods in front of the American line for about two miles, driving the Continental scouts and pickets within their lines.

The British Army was formed into three lines, the first consisting of the first and second battalions of light infantry, chasseurs and rifle corps. The second of the first and second battalions of British grenadiers, and the seventh and twenty-sixth battalions of Hessian grenadiers. The third line consisted of the first and second brigades of British infantry, some battalions of Hessians, and the sixteenth and seventeenth regiments of light dragoons.

The American line of battle was also composed of three lines; the right wing under command of General Sullivan, and the left wing under command of General Greene. The front line consisted of the Pennsylvania Militia, Smallwood's, the Second Maryland, Wayne's, Second Pennsylvania, Poor's, North Carolina, Learned's, Patterson's, Weedon's, Muhlenberg's and the Maryland Militia. The second line consisted of Maxwell's, Conway's, Woodford's, Scott's, Huntington's and Varnum's. Glover's brigade (forming the reserve) made the third line. Morgan's rifle corps formed on the left of the

Maryland Militia, and Webb's regiment on the right of the Pennsylvania Militia. These corps and the militia were to act in detachment, and not in solid or compact bodies, and were to skirmish with and harass the enemy as much as possible, taking special care to gain their flanks and rear if possible. Bland's and Baylor's regiments of light dragoons were to be annexed to the right wing and by small detachments to watch the movements of the enemy, giving intelligence thereof and to see that the enemy did not gain the flanks of the army without their knowledge. Moylan's and Sheldon's regiments were to be annexed to the left wing for the same purposes. The horse were to draw up in the intervals between the Continental troops and the militia upon the right and left of each wing. The park of artillery was to be divided between the wings and the rear of the front line. All these elaborate formations were for a battle that did not take place because the British, who had thrown down the gauntlet, which the Americans took up, failed to make good their challenge.

During the morning of Sunday the 7th, however, Major General Grey, with his brigade of light infantry of the guards, queen's rangers, Hessian and Anspach chasseurs, advanced from the British left over the rolling country that lies between these hills, toward the American centre. About noon Colonel Charles Webb's second Connecticut regiment of the line, supported by the militia brigade of General Potter, was sent out from the American camp to harass this corps; and at the request of Washington, General John Cadwalader and General Joseph Reed, who were visiting at headquarters,

also went out to observe this advance of the enemy and ascertain, if possible, their plan of attack. These volunteer generals, together with General Potter, endeavored to draw up the American troops in the woods, with a view to flanking the enemy, but their efforts were unsuccessful. The Americans, after a short skirmish, were obliged to retreat with the loss of many killed and wounded. Among them was Captain Amos Walbridge, who was wounded in the head, and Lieutenant John Harris, who was killed, both of the Connecticut line. General Reed made a narrow escape, having had his horse shot under him.

Later in the day of the 7th, Lieutenant Colonel Abercrombie at the head of the first and second battalions of British light infantry, chasseurs and rifle corps was sent out with orders to lie upon their arms as soon as they reached the banks of Sandy Run in front of the American camp. The British grenadiers marched one hundred yards in their rear, and the first and second British brigades, some Hessians and the sixteenth and seventeenth regiments of light dragoons, marched at the same distance behind the grenadiers. This more formidable movement naturally gave rise to the impression within the American camp that an attack upon their works by the British Army was imminent. A scattering fire had been kept up by Morgan's riflemen as a skirmishing party during the day. When this forward movement of the British Army began, and an attack was anticipated, Morgan, with his rifle corps, was ordered to move forward and attack their advanced and flanking parties. Similar orders were given to Colonel Mordecai Gist, who commanded about two

hundred Maryland Militia. At first the British advance broke and fled in disorder under the vigorous fire of Morgan's men. The British, however, were soon reinforced by a column of infantry and rallied. The American forces were outnumbered two to one. The Maryland Militia broke and ran, having sustained a loss of sixteen or seventeen men killed and wounded. The whole British fire was then concentrated upon Morgan's corps, threatening their flank, and they were forced to retreat.

This move of the British forces turned out, however, to be but a feint. The Continentals were not in the least intimidated by it, and as it looked very dangerous up there to the British from their insecure position behind Sandy Run, they did not remain long.

The next and last aggressive move in the military operations at Whitemarsh was made by the Americans. Toward sunset on the 7th, after Grey's detachment had rejoined the main army, after, indeed, the British had given it up, Morgan's riflemen, reinforced by five chosen men from each regiment in Varnum's and Huntington's brigades, advanced and took a strong position on elevated ground near Edge Hill. They had with them cannon that had been brought down from the Northern Army, where they had helped to bring about the surrender of Burgoyne. A hot fire was opened upon the British right by the Americans. They were immediately and vigorously attacked by Lord Cornwallis from his right wing, with the first battalion of light infantry, supported by the thirty-third regiment, and a hot fight ensued, which was sustained for some time with great resolution.

Finally Morgan and his men were repulsed with considerable loss, amounting to twenty-seven killed and wounded. Among the former was Major Morris, of Morgan's corps, a brave and gallant officer, who was held in high esteem by the Marquis Lafayette, who made provision for his family. Morgan succeeded, however, in bringing his men off in order, taking his cannon with him.

The British stated their losses at Whitemarsh to be as follows: one lieutenant, three sergeants, twenty-four rank and file killed; three lieutenants, four sergeants, fifty-seven rank and file wounded; thirty-three rank and file missing.

The British had found the centre and left of the American camp as strong and impregnable as they had found the right. They therefore held a council of general officers, in front of the British lines, at which "it was judged prudent to desist from the intended attack." Thereupon the whole British Army fell back on the night of Sunday the 7th, lighted their camp fires, and laid down in their humiliation to rest.

Prudence is not at best a good military word. It is not descriptive of the qualities that accomplish great military deeds, nor of the qualities one would expect to find in an aggressive standing army that marched out a few miles into the country, with great martial display, against an army of rebels it intended to disperse. If prudence had any proper place in such an army it would seem to have been within the comfortable security of its Philadelphia quarters, where courage was not required, and not out here after the army had met its enemy, at the end of its march, face to face. This was not the place for prudence where the situation it had made required all the

courage this standing army could command. But it seems to have been otherwise with this fine British Army when it was confronted by the bold attitude of its Continental enemies in the hills of Whitemarsh. Whatever courage this gallant army may have had in Philadelphia, or had brought out with it, was exchanged for prudence after it had realized upon this ground the real work it had to do.

All this firing on that Sunday at Whitemarsh was listened to in terror by the inmates of the quiet homes of this remote countryside.

During these military movements at Whitemarsh, which lasted for nearly four days, the men of both armies slept on their arms, and in their boots and clothes. Each army kept its pickets constantly out to watch the movements of the other. Light skirmishing was constantly going on, and firing was kept up between the pickets during the night. The weather was extremely cold.

Those were strained and active days at Whitemarsh. The struggle for the independence of the colonies was concentrated here in those four days. The armed forces involved in that struggle were here. It was one of the few places in the history of the war where the two main armies met face to face, certainly with hostile intent so far as the British were concerned. The Americans had reason to believe that that intent would be carried out, and they were not afraid of it. It is for the British historian to explain why, instead of the few skirmishes I have mentioned, there did not occur here one of the notable battles of the war.

You will have noticed that while we speak of this his-

torical event in the War of the Revolution as "Whitemarsh," only the right of the army was in the township of that name. Washington's headquarters, the centre and left of the army, and the skirmishes between the troops which took place on Sunday, were to the eastward, in the townships of Upper Dublin, Springfield and Cheltenham, and not near the Bethlehem Road.

The area over which the fighting was done was about a mile and a half square. You can form some idea of the scene of the skirmishes between those two armies if you will walk along the Church Road from St. Thomas' Church to the point where that road crosses Willow Grove Avenue.

The rear guard of the British Army, under command of Lord Cornwallis, quitted Edge Hill about four o'clock on the afternoon of the 8th, and Major General Grey, with the rest of the British Army, retired from his post about the same time.

These troops marched back by the Limekiln and the Old York Roads burning, pillaging and destroying as they went, venting upon the innocent and defenceless the wrath of their mortification and disappointment, and seeking in vengeance that which they had failed to achieve in valor.

The whole British Army was back within its fortifications in Philadelphia at nine o'clock that night.

This was the second time General Howe had cautiously reconnoitered the position of Washington's Army, strongly entrenched on high ground in his front. He had stormed the entrenchments at Bunker Hill, and had seen his troops driven back again and again with terrible slaughter. Once after

that, when the plan of his campaign lay across New Jersey in the early part of this year of 1777, with the capture of Philadelphia as his object, he paused before Washington's Army in the hills at Middlebrook with his thoughts full of his terrible experiences at Bunker Hill, and rather than take the consequences of an attack he changed his plan of campaign and approached Philadelphia by the circuitous way of the Chesapeake. When he had brought his reinforced army out of Philadelphia to Whitemarsh, with the intention, as he had announced to the Ministry, of giving battle to the Continental Army and found that army in the hills before us, the same dread came again into his mind, and after remaining in the front of Washington's Army for the greater part of four days he returned in humiliation to Philadelphia. His army came out with great pomp, like that army in Flanders, and marched back again amid the derision of the whole population of Philadelphia.

André, that close observer of the personnel of the Continental Army, was there, and Cornwallis, and the kindly and honest Knyphausen with his strong and predatory Hessians; Grey, who had surprised Wayne's unfortified camp at Paoli, and all the array of the British Army were there to witness this fine spectacle of these ragged Continentals whom they had twice defeated during the campaign in open battle, standing defiantly in their entrenchments, not budging an inch, waiting patiently to hurl them back if they should have the courage to attack them.

The Continental Army was not well disciplined at that time. It was chiefly made up of young men who had been

EMLEN HOUSE, WHITEMARSH, PA., WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS, 1777.

REAR OR NORTH VIEW, 1909.

soldiers for only a short time. There were no veterans in it. All the discipline the army ever had was acquired afterwards at Valley Forge.

The British did not come out with the dash one might have expected from so fine an army. On the contrary, their movements were cautious, hesitating—almost timid. They took a strong position in the hills, at a safe distance, where they remained for nearly two days without doing anything, and then moved on, still seeking the security of the hills, and after two or three skirmishes in which, in every instance, the Americans were the attacking party, they went away, having accomplished nothing. It may be said that the Americans were too strongly entrenched. Their entrenchments hardly compensated for the want of the many things they were without, and with which the British Army was so plentifully supplied. They did not balance the account between them. The two armies would have been greatly unequal if the fortifications had been taken away. It would have been folly to have given them up—to have come out of them to accommodate their enemies by fighting them on unequal terms in the open field. Yet those, it seems, were the only terms upon which the British Army would fight. The result of the military movement at Whitemarsh cannot fairly be called a drawn battle. It was a substantial victory for the Americans.

We wonder, as we contemplate it, and study its details, how it was possible. Both armies, with the exception of the Hessians were of the same great Anglo-Saxon race, but the British forces had everything, and the poor Continentals had almost nothing. The British were comfortably housed, well

fed, well armed, well trained and disciplined, well clothed, well paid, superior in numbers, successful. The Continental soldiers were in want of all these absolute essentials of a victorious army. In addition to their struggles with the enemy their lives were spent in one continual struggle with want and suffering, in situations that were almost unbearable. If we were to place two such armies as these in the balance, under ordinary circumstances, the result would not be doubtful. The disparity between them would seem to justify the arrogance of the British Army. It is necessary to seek further for the result as it actually turned out to be. There we find the solution. The one was made up of the creatures of an unjust, tyrannical, oppressive power, with its cruel, military hirelings. The other was composed of a band of patriots out here poorly sheltered, in these bleak hills, fighting for the preservation of its liberties, its honor, its homes and its firesides, with a man at its head whom an English historian has said "was the noblest figure that ever stood in the forefront of a nation's life."

The campaign of 1777 was over, and it became necessary to provide winter quarters for the troops. So on the 11th of December the camp at Whitemarsh was broken and the Continental Army took up its sad, dreary march along this Skippack road that runs in front of us on their way to build their huts and endure their sufferings in the bleak hills of Valley Forge.

The roads were frozen hard, and in the words of Washington, "You might have tracked the army from Whitemarsh to Valley Forge by the blood of their feet."

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